

# Conversations matter: **alcohol**

Providing you with information to support youth in making informed decisions

**50%**

of youth ages 15 to 19 reported that they drink alcohol



Starting a conversation about alcohol with a young person in your life can be overwhelming. But whether a young person currently drinks alcohol or not, it is important to talk about the effects drinking can have on their life. Adults can support youth in making informed choices about alcohol if they remember these tips:

- Keep the conversation respectful, with open dialogue.
- Focus on safety.
- Model appropriate alcohol use yourself.

## How can I keep the young people in my life safe?

You can't control what another person does, but you can be supportive and provide them with information. Here are a few things to keep in mind:



- Encourage young people to set limits when drinking, and not to mix alcohol with other drugs.
- Talk about when alcohol should be avoided, such as at school or work, and when driving.
- Model safe use of alcohol, including setting limits for yourself and sticking to them.
- Talk about the importance of having a safe ride home, such as a taxi, a ride share, or a responsible adult or friend who has not been drinking.

## Suggested limits for youth

Although not drinking alcohol is often the safest choice for youth, that doesn't always happen. If young people are going to drink, the suggested maximum amounts are:

- never more than 1 or 2 standard drinks at a time
- never more than 1 or 2 times per week.

A person's age, body weight, environment and overall health play a factor in how alcohol will affect them.



## What are the signs that a young person's drinking has become a problem?

Not all drinking is problematic, but it can become so. Drinking becomes a problem when it causes challenges in a person's life. Problematic drinking and addiction often begin in adolescence, so it's important to know the signs. They can include:



- conflict with friends or family
- isolating themselves from friends or family
- withdrawing from school or work
- losing interest in hobbies
- drinking alone
- memory loss
- mood swings
- trouble with the law.

## Is it addictive?

It can be.

Most alcohol-related illnesses, social problems, accidents and deaths are caused by "problem drinking." This term describes alcohol use that causes problems in a person's life, but does not include physical dependence, one sign of addiction. Problem drinking is **four times** as common as severe alcohol dependence.

Physical dependence involves tolerance to alcohol's effects, which means people need more alcohol to produce the desired effect. Physical dependence also includes withdrawal symptoms when regular alcohol use is abruptly stopped.



**Youth can become addicted to alcohol. Knowing the signs of addiction, and having a trusted adult who models good behaviour and is open and available to talk can help keep youth safe.**

For more information about substance use, visit:  
[www.camh.ca/talking-about-and-spotting-substance-abuse](http://www.camh.ca/talking-about-and-spotting-substance-abuse)

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